

A Comparative Analysis of the Social and Political Thought of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and Guruchand Thakur: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

This research examines the social and political theory of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar and Guruchand Thakur, two Indian reformers that have shaped the country's tradition of opposition to caste and social reform. Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar established a theoretical foundation based upon constitutional principles and philosophy that would provide the basis for the abolition of caste and the establishment of democratic justice. Guruchand Thakur has become a prominent reformer within his region, developing a socio-religious movement to empower the Namasudra and Matua castes in Bengal. A qualitative comparative methodology was used in this study to examine the social and political theory of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar and Guruchand Thakur by employing a systematic review of secondary sources selected through a PRISMA style process. Secondary literature consisted of 21 academic sources from an original 51 articles. These results highlight both similarities and differences in their theories relating to education, critiques of caste, social reform, and political organization. The research also shows how their ideas continue to relate to current discussions concerning social justice and inclusive democracy in India.

Keywords: Ambedkar; Guruchand Thakur; Social Justice; Dalit Political Thought

Plain Language Summary

The purpose of this research is to explore two viewpoints of B.R. Ambedkar (Dr.) and Guruchand Thakur concerning caste, education, political participation and the structure of society. Both men advocated for the improvement of those who were socially disenfranchised by caste, and sought an end to caste-based injustice. While Dr. B.R. Ambedkar focused his efforts toward obtaining equal status through laws that would protect the rights of all marginalized peoples in India via constitutional reform and legal protections, Guruchand Thakur was primarily active in Bengal and supported education, communal solidarity and a social awareness movement for the Namasudra and Matua communities.

INTRODUCTION

It is clear that both Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Guruchand Thakur contributed greatly to the conversation about social justice and caste freedom in India. However, there are some very different elements in how they approached this challenge of fighting caste inequality. Ambedkar's work was a product of his time in colonial and post-colonial India and addressed issues like institutionalized caste-based discrimination and untouchability across all of India (Ambedkar, 1936; Mandal & Kondekar, 2026) and advocated for constitutional democracy, representation, equality and the total destruction of the caste system (Omvedt, 2004).

On the other hand, Guruchand Thakur, worked as one of the most prominent social reformers in Bengal especially with the Namasudra community. He was an essential leader of the Matua movement and stressed education, religious reform, and community organizing as ways to empower those who were socially and economically marginalized (Biswas, 2014; Lahiri, 2020). Furthermore, Thakur's efforts laid the groundwork for developing a sense of political awareness or consciousness among lower castes in Bengal (Datta, 2023; Guha, 2022).

This comparative analysis is vital to understand the variety of anti-caste ideas in India. While there have been many studies of Ambedkar's legacy at the national level, Thakur's contributions will provide valuable local insights into Dalit and Subaltern Studies (Das, 2026; Walker, 1999). Therefore, this article will be comparing the social and political thoughts of Ambedkar and Thakur by exploring themes including education, critique of caste systems, community organizations and political empowerment.

Literature Review

The political-philosophical works of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar are central to our understanding of Dalit Studies, Social Justice Discourse, and Modern Indian Political Thought. Ambedkar's critical works include his seminal text *Annihilation of Caste* (1936). In *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar defined caste as a structurally embedded systems that hinders democracy, equality, and fraternity. Beyond caste, Ambedkar's political thought includes issues of constitutionalism, minority rights and social democracy. As such, his ideas remain pertinent today in contemporary debates about inclusivity and representation. Omvedt (2004) has argued that Ambedkar's political philosophy represents a framework for transformative emancipatory politics and democratic enlightenment.

Dalit Studies have recently been able to provide a useful analytical lens for understanding caste, identity formation, resistance and subaltern agency. There are currently many scholars who are moving away from more traditional sociological readings of caste and instead exploring ways in which caste intersects with class, gender, culture and political representation. Mandal & Kondekar (2026) provide new theoretical insight into some of the key terms and concepts used in Dalit Studies; specifically marginality, resistance, social exclusion and identity politics. Additionally their work provides a site for locating Dalit Studies within other interdisciplinary fields of social sciences.

There is a large body of literature that focuses upon the Matua Movement and the lasting impact of Guruchand Thakur on Bengal's socio-political history. However, scholars emphasize that the Matua Movement was not simply a religious reform movement but rather an effective tool of caste consciousness and social mobilization for the Namasudra Community. Adhikari (2025) argues that the Matua Movement effectively challenged caste based inequality within both the Bengal and Bangladesh contexts. Furthermore, Adhikari (2025) notes that the Matua Movement was successful because of its ability to challenge the Brahminical social order and caste hierarchies. Similarly, in her sociological study of the Matua Mahasangha, Lahiri (2020) shows how Guruchand Thakur's legacy shapes community identity, collective mobilization, and social empowerment.

Caste identity politics in West Bengal has garnered a significant amount of scholarly focus; especially as regards the Namasudra and Matua Communities. More recent studies examine how caste identity, refugee politics, and electoral mobilization intersect within regional political landscapes. For example, Datta (2023) examines the political assertion of the Namasudra Community and its implications for identity formation and representation in West Bengal. Guha (2022) similarly explores the development of caste politics in Bengal, emphasizing both continuity and change in the political mobilization of marginalized

communities. Both studies demonstrate the continued salience of Guruchand Thakur's socio-political thoughts in contemporary regional politics.

Finally, comparative studies of Dalit Literature and Regional Caste Discourses have contributed to the intellectual underpinnings for comparative social analyses. Specifically, Das (2026) offers a comparative analysis of Dalit Literature in Maharashtra and West Bengal; highlighting regional differences in caste experiences, literary expressions, and political consciousness. Comparative studies like Das' can provide a robust base for understanding how anti-caste thought and movements against caste oppression evolved differently across regions while retaining similar emancipation goals. Given the nature of the present study, this corpus of literature supports a comparative reading of Ambedkar and Guruchand Thakur in both national and regional frames of reference.

Research Gap

While there is an abundance of research into Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's anti-caste theory and the Matua movement in Bengal, relatively little has been done to provide a comparative analysis of the two men. Most of the work that has been done has focused on either national-level Dalit politics or region-specific caste movements. As such, much of the comparative scholarly work needed to better understand how different regional and national anti-caste systems intersect is missing. This study will address this void by using the same thematic categories (education, caste opposition and political mobilization) to examine their social and political ideas side-by-side.

Research Questions

RQ.1. What are the key similarities and distinctions in the social philosophies of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and Guruchand Thakur?

RQ.2. In what ways did both intellectuals understand caste oppression and the empowerment of communities?

RQ.3. How is their political thought relevant to contemporary discussions on social justice?

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the social and political ideologies of Ambedkar and Guruchand Thakur.
- To explore their perspectives on caste, education, and the mobilization of communities.
- To evaluate their significance in contemporary debates on social justice and democracy.

Research Methodology

This current study adopted a qualitative comparative research method for a critical assessment of the social and political thoughts of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Guruchand Thakur. Qualitative methods were considered most suitable for this study as it focused on interpretation, comparison, and critique of philosophical theories, social reform approaches, and political thoughts (as opposed to quantitative data). A comparative research framework also allowed for an organized examination of both the similarities and differences that existed within their viewpoints about caste, education, social justice, dignity and community empowerment.

Secondary data was used as the base of this study. Peer reviewed journal articles, academic texts, edited collections, Doctoral Dissertations, and scholarly published works related to Ambedkar Studies; Dalit Studies; Caste Discourse; Matua Movement; Identity Politics in Bengal were utilized with particular

emphasis on studies concerning anti-caste thought, social reform, educational empowerment, and political representation.

Table 1: Search Strategy Matrix

Sl. No.	Search Domain	Search Keywords / Boolean Strings	Purpose
1	Core Thinkers	“Ambedkar” AND “Guruchand Thakur”	To identify comparative literature on both thinkers
2	Thematic Concepts	“Dalit studies”, “social justice”, “anti-caste thought”	To collect theoretical and conceptual literature
3	Education and Reform	“education and empowerment”, “social reform”, “political mobilization”	To identify studies linked to the research objectives
4	Regional Context	“Matua movement”, “Namasudra community”, “West Bengal caste politics”	To retrieve Bengal-specific and regional sources
5	Supplementary Search	Books, dissertations, and journal repositories	To expand and verify the literature base

Table 2: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion and exclusion criteria mentioned above were meticulously enforced during both the screening and full-text eligibility phases of the PRISMA-guided review. This approach ensured methodological uniformity and enhanced the reliability and significance of the 21 studies ultimately selected for thematic analysis.

Sl. No.	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
1	Studies directly related to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Guruchand Thakur, Dalit studies, Matua movement, and caste politics	Duplicate articles and repeated references
2	Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, edited book chapters, and doctoral dissertations	Non-academic sources such as blogs, informal websites, opinion pieces, and unpublished web content
3	Sources relevant to the themes of education, caste critique, social reform, political representation, and community mobilization	Studies not directly aligned with the title, research questions, and objectives of the study
4	Scholarly works published in English from credible academic sources	Sources with only peripheral mention of the key thinkers and insufficient thematic relevance

A PRISMA style selection process was used to make certain that there would be no bias or lack of academic methodology in identifying or selecting information. Initially, it was determined that there were 51 peer-reviewed research studies and other academic resources found via a systematic search of journals using multiple database platforms; books from major book publishers; institutional repositories; and dissertation archives. Prior to conducting the screen stage, there were six (6) duplicated entries identified

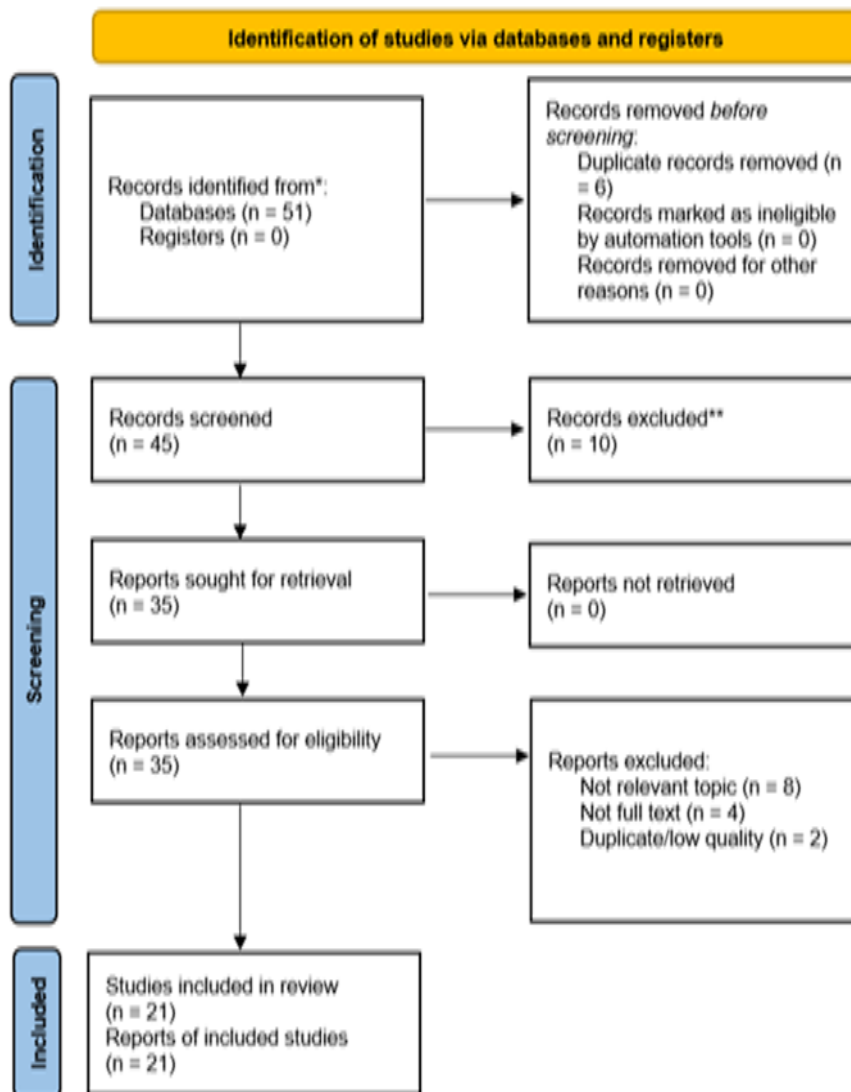
and removed. The number of unique records available at the start of the title and abstract screen stage was 45.

During the screening phase, ten (10) records were removed as they were deemed to have little to no relationship with the subject matter and objectives of this study. Thirty-five (35) of the remaining reports were selected for review to assess their eligibility.

Following a comprehensive review of full-text eligibility, 14 reports were dismissed due to their lack of relevance to the topic, unavailability of full-text versions, and insufficient academic quality. Ultimately, 21 articles and scholarly sources were selected for the final thematic analysis.

Figure 1. The PRISMA 2020 flow diagram depicts the process of selecting studies, narrowing down from 51 identified records to 21 studies that were ultimately included in the final review.

PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for new systematic reviews which included searches of databases and registers only



Thematic Analysis

An examination of the works identified through this literature review will be conducted utilizing thematic analysis; a qualitative research technique that is recognized throughout the world for identifying and

organizing common themes, ideas and patterns in all of the studies examined. These thematic categories were established based on both the objectives of this study and the two major areas of inquiry (research questions) of this investigation. Utilizing thematic analysis allowed for an organized and systemic comparison of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's and Guruchand Thakur's thoughts regarding caste critique, education and social mobilization.

The major analytical themes identified in the study include:

- anti-caste philosophy
- education as empowerment
- social dignity and reform
- caste critique
- political representation
- community mobilization
- contemporary relevance of social justice thought

The analytical framework for comparing and interpreting the chosen literature was built around these thematic categories.

Discussion and Analysis

Objective 1: Comparative Social Thought

It is well understood that Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and Guruchand Thakur both provided social support to many who were socially and economically marginalized; however, they came from two very different socio-historical backgrounds. There are similarities in the goals of the social theories created by these two thinkers. Nevertheless, there exist significant differences in terms of methodology and area of focus. Ambedkar's social theory has its roots in the critique of caste as a social structure and institution that has been instrumental in creating inequalities and exclusions. In fact, he saw caste as being inherently contrary to democracy, freedom and human dignity. His concept of society has been based upon the fundamental principles of liberty, equality and fraternity and it is upon this basis that he critiqued the dominant ideology of Brahminism and called for the "annihilation" of caste (Ambedkar, 1936).

On the other hand, Guruchand Thakur developed his social theory within the context of the lives of the members of the Namashudra caste group, one of the most excluded castes in Bengal (Biswas, 2014; Lahiri, 2020). While Ambedkar's social theory can be described as broad, constitutional and philosophical, Guruchand Thakur's social theory was primarily centered around the experiences of particular communities and social reforms. Through collective identity building, religious awakening and social solidarity, he worked toward restoring dignity and pride among marginalized communities. Under his leadership, the Matua movement also became a prominent site for raising social awareness about issues facing lower caste communities in Bengal (Datta, 2023; Adhikari, 2025).

While both thinkers have shared similar commitments to promoting social dignity and empowering individuals collectively, they differ in terms of scale and focus. That is to say, while Ambedkar's thoughts operate at a national/structural level, Guruchand Thakur's ideas have existed in a local/regional community frame. This difference adds richness to our comparative study of anti-caste thinking in India and demonstrates how anti-caste thinking has evolved across various spaces and locales (Guha, 2022; Das, 2026).

Objective 2: Views on Education, Caste, and Mobilization

Ambedkar and Guruchand Thakur have similar views about the importance of education. Both thinkers

believe that education is a major vehicle for liberation. According to Ambedkar, the primary method of liberating people from oppression is through education. Ambedkar's well-known slogan "Educate, Agitate, Organize" represents how Ambedkar believed that education would provide individuals with greater awareness, and thus, lead to greater resistance, ultimately leading to collective liberation. Education was viewed by Ambedkar as a way for oppressed communities to be aware of their rights as citizens under a democratic government and to challenge forms of oppression through various avenues such as gaining political consciousness. Similarly, Guruchand Thakur viewed education as one of the best ways to break down social barriers and empower the oppressed. Through promoting literacy and establishing schools for Namasudras in Bengal, Guruchand Thakur aimed to promote self-confidence among lower caste groups, as well as promote collective awareness and empowerment. As such, both thinkers view education as a path to empowerment, social mobility and dignity.

The two thinkers' views on caste are quite different. While Ambedkar viewed caste as an oppressive social institution that required total eradication (Ambedkar, 1936), Guruchand Thakur viewed caste as an obstacle to social advancement that can be overcome through the development of an alternate sense of identity based upon religious affiliation (Matua) rather than solely through critique of religious institutions or texts (Biswas, 2019; Adhikari, 2025).

Finally, both thinkers place a high value on organization and mobilization. While Ambedkar emphasized the need for political representation, legal protections and affirmative action policies (Omvedt, 2004) as mechanisms of social change, Guruchand Thakur has sought to promote mobilization through the creation of community-based organizations based upon social solidarity, religion and local leadership (Guha, 2022; Datta, 2023).

Objective 3: Contemporary Relevance

Ambedkar's political and social thoughts have remained as relevant today as they were yesterday. Ambedkar is responsible for shaping how India is governed under Constitutional Democracy and the many ways he has influenced Social Justice Movements, Affirmative Action Policies, and Discourse surrounding Equality and Human Rights. As such, Ambedkar's ideas and opinions are at the center of all the current debate around Caste Discrimination, Reservation Policy, and what rights Marginalized Communities have. Similarly, Guruchand Thakur's legacy is also having a lasting impact on the Socio-Political Landscape of West Bengal. Specifically with regards to the Matua and Namasudra communities. His ideology can be seen today in Contemporary Caste Politics, Refugee Identity Issues, Electoral Mobilization in Bengal, etc. As such the Matua Community continues to play a major role in Regional Politics of West Bengal. This shows that there is great relevance to his Social Thought. What makes the relative relevance of both thinkers so comparable is that both of them use Legal Reform and Grassroots Mobilization of Social Groups to bring about Social Change. Ambedkar will provide you with the structure for Institutional/Constitutional Justice, while Guruchand Thakur will provide you with a Model for Community Based Empowerment and Identity Assertion. Thus together, the two provide a comprehensive understanding of Social Justice that is relevant to Academic, Political and Social Discussion Today.

Findings

Ambedkar and Guruchand Thakur shared a common concern with using education as an instrument to uplift oppressed groups and increase their social standing. However, they developed distinctly different methods to accomplish this goal. Ambedkar was primarily concerned with constitutional reforms, legal protection and institutional transformation to eliminate caste discrimination, while Guruchand Thakur

relied upon empowering individuals at the local level by providing them education; creating group consciousness, and religiously based mobilization through the Matua Movement.

Educational Implications

Education has the power to empower people socially and help them promote democracy and inclusiveness, as noted by both Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar and Guruchand Thakur who both stated that education is a primary way to free marginalized groups from oppression. As such, the ideas of these two thinkers are very much relevant today when developing new policies or curricula for schools in India.

Moreover, this research supports the need to include historical social reform movements (specifically from Eastern India) in standard academic literature. By including these historically rich examples of reform efforts in academic courses in sociology, political science, education, and history, educators will have an additional resource to teach students about diverse forms of social transformation.

Limitation and Delimitations of the Study

This research relies solely on secondary sources and excludes any empirical research conducted in the field. The comparative analysis is confined to specific thematic areas, including education, caste, and political mobilization. The study focuses exclusively on the ideas of Ambedkar and Guruchand Thakur, omitting other anti-caste thinkers.

Significance of the Study

This work expands our knowledge of comparative social and political thought as well as anti-caste views at both national and regional levels. In addition to strengthening the body of Dalit Studies through its focus on the importance of social reform within Bengal in relation to Ambedkar's philosophy, this work represents an integrated framework of ideas that will provide a more sophisticated understanding of anti-caste movements. Specifically, this work illustrates how local reform initiatives within Bengal have contributed to the broader Dalit emancipatory projects. The integrated approach represented by this work further serves to challenge dominant discourses that are often limited to focusing solely upon Ambedkarite perspectives, thus expanding the scope of anti-caste scholarship to include a variety of regional experiences and intellectual contributions. Ultimately, the integration of the approaches taken in this work, is intended to develop a deeper level of theoretical insight while establishing a critical base for future interdisciplinary research related to caste, social justice, and political mobilization throughout India.

Suggestions

Future research could involve conducting fieldwork within Matua communities. Comparative analyses with figures like Jyotirao Phule and Harichand Thakur might be explored. It is important to integrate more regional Dalit leaders into the mainstream academic conversation. Educational curriculum reforms should incorporate both thinkers into social science studies.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of Guruchand Thakur and Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar indicates that while both thinkers developed anti-caste social and political thought; they did so within complementary but historically contextualized frameworks. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was able to develop a comprehensive, philosophical, and structural critique of caste as a system of oppression. Conversely, Guruchand Thakur's

framework for social transformation focused on the lived experiences of the Namasudra and Matua communities of Bengal and relied heavily upon a community based, regional approach to social change. Although the historical and social context in which these thinkers operated were very different from each other, they both believed in the upliftment of the marginalized through an emphasis on dignity, education, collective action and social justice. These two thinkers together create a richer understanding of democracy, equality and human rights by showing how social transformation can occur both through institutional reform and community empowered grassroots mobilization.

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Data Access Statement

The data utilized in this study are derived entirely from secondary sources, such as published books, journal articles, and academic dissertations. All sources are duly cited in the reference section.

Ethics

Since this study relies solely on secondary data and published literature, no human participants were involved, and thus, formal ethical approval was not necessary. All sources have been acknowledged in accordance with APA 7th edition guidelines.

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